



FEMA

Sharing Information
Enhancing Preparedness
Strengthening Homeland Security

**Lessons Learned
Information Sharing**
LLIS.gov

LESSON LEARNED

Special Needs Registries: Coordinating with Law Enforcement Organizations to Strengthen Support for Individuals with Disabilities and Functional Needs

SUMMARY

Jurisdictions can use their special needs registries to strengthen law enforcement personnel support for and response to individuals with disabilities or other functional needs during emergencies.

DESCRIPTION

In January 2004, law enforcement personnel arrested two 14-year-old students with autism at their high school in Santa Clarita, California, on separate occasions within the same week. On both occasions, law enforcement personnel were unaware of the disabilities and communication issues of the students. Teachers at the high school released the students to law enforcement personnel without being able to explain the students' exceptional needs. The parents of the students and the school principal were not aware of the situation. In response to these events, the Santa Clarita Valley community began discussing ways that communication and sharing information could improve law enforcement response to and interaction with people with disabilities and other functional needs.

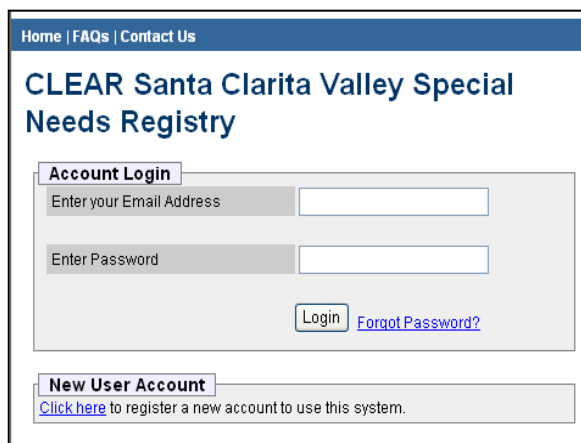
Santa Clarita is located in Southern California and has a population of more than 177,000 people, making it the 4th largest city in Los Angeles County and the 26th largest city in California. The city sits within the larger Santa Clarita Valley.

Santa Clarita established a voluntary paper registry of individuals with disabilities and other functional needs in October 2004. The primary purpose of the Santa Clarita Valley Special Needs Registry was to provide key information about individuals with disabilities to the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Station in advance of an emergency or encounter with law enforcement. Individuals submitted their background information, physical descriptions, and photographs for inclusion in the Special Needs Registry, which was securely maintained by the Sheriff's Station. In addition, individuals submitted information about where the individual was likely to wander in the event that he or she would go missing.

The Special Needs Registry also assisted law enforcement personnel in search and rescue operations. Prior to the establishment of the Registry, law enforcement personnel had to gather information and the missing person's photograph before circulating information about the person to law enforcement vehicles on duty. Once the Registry was instituted, if a person from the Registry was missing, law enforcement personnel had the person's information and photograph available to circulate immediately. The Registry also helped identify found individuals with disabilities and other functional needs who could not identify themselves.

In 2009, Santa Clarita linked the Registry with Project Lifesaver, a program designed to assist Santa Clarita Valley sheriff deputies in locating individuals with medical needs, such as autism or Alzheimer's disease, who have a tendency to wander. Individuals in the Project Lifesaver program wear a bracelet that is tracked by radio frequency-based equipment at the Sheriff's Station. All those who used Project Lifesaver equipment were automatically enrolled in the Special Needs Registry. On several occasions when a person went missing, law enforcement personnel had all the necessary information to begin search and rescue operations immediately.

In late 2009, Santa Clarita converted the paper Registry into an online Registry to better serve the community. The online Registry allows individuals to register from home; law enforcement personnel can view updates to the Registry in real-time. Individuals who participate in the Registry are mailed two Special Needs Registry identification cards that contain information from the registration form and can be presented to law enforcement personnel or responders in the event of an emergency. Law enforcement personnel can conduct directed searches on the Registry for missing people by descriptors such as gender or age. Law enforcement personnel can also use the Registry to create a missing person flier that contains the person's photograph and who to contact with information.

The image is a screenshot of a web browser displaying the 'CLEAR Santa Clarita Valley Special Needs Registry' website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'FAQs', and 'Contact Us'. Below this, the main heading reads 'CLEAR Santa Clarita Valley Special Needs Registry'. The page is divided into two main sections. The first section, titled 'Account Login', contains two input fields: 'Enter your Email Address' and 'Enter Password'. Below these fields are two buttons: 'Login' and 'Forgot Password?'. The second section, titled 'New User Account', contains a single button labeled 'Click here' followed by the text 'to register a new account to use this system.'.

Registration Web Site for Santa Clarita Valley Special Needs Registry

The online Special Needs Registry has greatly improved the effectiveness of search and rescue operations for persons with disabilities and functional needs in Santa Clarita by eliminating the need for information-gathering prior to commencing rescue operations. On one occasion, law enforcement personnel located a young boy who had eluded his caretakers by using the Registry to gather the boy's photograph, his physical description, and the location where the boy was likely to have gone. In addition, the Registry has been particularly useful for search and rescue operations involving individuals who go missing repeatedly. When law enforcement personnel conduct a search for a person with a disability or functional need who is not registered, that individual is encouraged to participate in the Registry and in Project Lifesaver upon rescue.

In January 2011, Santa Clarita began phasing out Project Lifesaver radio frequency trackers by replacing them with EmFinders, which are cellular trackers. The new trackers allow law enforcement personnel to track individuals throughout the country instead of only within Santa Clarita. In addition, Santa Clarita plans to create an informative video to circulate on television and online that raises public awareness about the Registry and the EmFinders technology.

Jurisdictions can use their special needs registries to strengthen law enforcement personnel support for and response to individuals with disabilities or other functional needs during emergencies.

CITATIONS

City of Santa Clarita, Special Needs Registry/EmFinders.

<http://www.santa-clarita.com/index.aspx?page=755>

Iland, Emily. Project Manager, Board of Directors of the Santa Clarita Autism Asperger Network. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 13 Oct 2010.

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency management and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.